

AACR Early-career Hill Day and Science Policy and Advocacy Opportunities

AACR Early-career Hill Day

With the increasing complexity of cancer-related policy issues, the need for active engagement of cancer researchers and physician-scientists in the policymaking process has never been greater. Every year since 2016, the AACR hosts the Early-career Hill Day, an opportunity for Associate Members to meet with their congressional representatives and discuss issues facing early-career scientists in cancer research. Most years, Associate Members from across the country gather in Washington, D.C. to urge their representatives to support robust, sustained and predictable funding for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the National Cancer Institute (NCI). Although the pandemic has required a shift from in-person to virtual meetings over the past few years, on March 3, 2022, thirty-six AACR Associate members who are early-career researchers will meet with over 70 congressional offices to advocate on behalf of their fellow scientists.

Below, the AACR-Associate Member Council (AMC) members who are AACR Early-career Hill Day alumni share their experiences and outline additional professional development opportunities related to science policy for AACR Associate Members.

AACR-Associate Member Council (AMC) 2022-2023

Reflections from AACR-AMC Early-career Hill Day alumni

Kristin Altwegg - *“The virtual training provided by the AACR Science Policy team was exhilarating because I got to meet pre- and post-docs from across the U.S. I had the opportunity to ask my fellow delegates about their pre- to post-doctoral transitions, their personal platform for science advocacy, any advice they could give, and their experiences from previous AACR Early-career Hill Days. In addition to receiving advocacy training, we had the opportunity to hear from NCI/NIH representatives on the current state of biomedical research funding within the United States. After the general meet and greet, we broke into our teams to rehearse for the event. I was paired with experienced AACR Early-career Hill Day veterans Dr. Kimiko Krieger from Baylor College of Medicine and Melody Tan, a predoctoral candidate from Rice University. Overall, it was an incredible learning experience for me and a wonderful opportunity to connect with scientists and science policy advocates across the U.S. After our last meeting concluded, I realized I had been talking about cancer research for about seven hours, and I was just as excited as when the day began! I would like to sincerely thank the AACR for the incredible opportunity and the offices of Senator Cornyn, Representative Jackson-Lee, Representative Roy, Representative Green, and Representative Fletcher for their time and support of early career scientists, cancer research initiatives, and biomedical sciences.”*

Bianca Islam - *“I have been fortunate enough to attend several Early-career Hill days in-person and virtually over the past several years to advocate for cancer research. These experiences have been invaluable and have helped me form deeper relationships with my colleagues at*

AACR and in the science policy arena. The AACR organization is built on advocacy and has a vested interest in developing early-career scientists to continue this mission of advocacy well into their professional careers. As a member of the Associate Member council, over the past year I have had the opportunity to join the AACR Science and Policy Government Affairs (SPGA) Committee. For over 25 years, the SPGA has focused on devising and implementing strategies to influence important biomedical research-related public policy issues. I've seen first-hand how this committee has been working extra hard to periodically inform our legislators in Washington, D.C. and make the case for increased funding for all forms of biomedical research. We submit testimony to Congress, government agencies and advisory boards, and help shape special sessions to educate members of Congress and their staff about important issues affecting cancer research.

During my clinical and research training, I moved from Georgia to Ohio, and it afforded me the opportunity to advocate for research funding before members of Congress in both of these states. In all cases, the message has been clear that funding for cancer research is crucial for continued progress in developing new treatments for our patients and access to key clinical trials and screening prevention. During the Covid pandemic we have seen a lot of positive changes occur in how we communicate with patients virtually, but we have also seen delayed screening because the hospitals and clinics have been at capacity. Now more than ever, our efforts must address the challenges of our current times and the best way is through advocacy efforts like the Annual Early-career Hill Day.”

Other Opportunities

National Day of Action: March 3, 2022

Despite the limited number of spaces to attend the AACR Early-career Hill Day, Associate Members can engage from anywhere in the United States at the same time that the participants are meeting with Congress. The AACR encourages all early-career researchers and those who support them to join in an all-day movement, the National Day of Action, to reinforce the messages of their colleagues. Those who are interested can participate by contacting their congressional representatives and senators to urge their support for robust, sustained and predictable funding increases for the NIH and NCI. It only takes a few minutes to send an email and/or call your congressional representative and senators, and your voice can greatly help advance and ensure maximum impact of our message to Congress! [Learn more](#).

Science Policy Opportunities at the AACR Annual Meeting

In addition to AACR Early-career Hill Day and the National Day of Action, AACR Annual Meeting programming also provides AACR members with opportunities to learn about and become more involved in science policy.

The [Regulatory Science and Policy Track](#) and [Science and Health Policy Track](#) on the [Annual Meeting 2022 online planner](#) provides attendees with opportunities to interact with regulators, industry experts, and academics, including basic researchers and physician scientists. The sessions that make up this programming are designed to highlight recent regulatory developments and provide an open forum for the discussion of cutting-edge issues in cancer drug, biologic, and diagnostic regulation. A list of topics from previous Annual Meetings can be found [here](#).

Joint Hill Day with AACI

Each year the AACR partners with the Association of American Cancer Institutes (AACI) to host a Hill Day in support of cancer research. This event brings cancer center directors, researchers,

physician-scientists, cancer survivors and other advocates together to build support for a strong federal investment in biomedical research, and cancer research in particular, through the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the National Cancer Institute (NCI). The 2022 joint Hill Day will take on Wednesday, June 15 in a virtual format. Registration will open in April [here](#).

Rally for Medical Research

The Rally for Medical Research initiative was launched in April 2013 to bring together the entire medical research community to ask Congress to make the NIH a national priority. Through the annual Hill Day, the Rally for Medical Research continues to raise awareness about the critical need for an increased investment in the NIH to improve health, spur progress, inspire hope, and save more lives. During the 2021 Rally for Medical Research, over 400 advocates representing almost every state took part in nearly 300 virtual meetings with their members of Congress and staff. Participants thanked Congress for enacting six straight years of robust funding increases for the NIH, while requesting that members support an increase of at least \$3.5 billion in NIH funding for fiscal year (FY) 2022, as well as at least \$10 billion in emergency supplemental funding for the NIH to continue research disrupted by the pandemic.

Advocates and partner organizations also participated in a National Day of Action on September 23, amplifying the Rally message via social media and email campaigns. Over 650 tweets and re-retweets were shared in conjunction with the Rally, generating 4.3 million impressions. More information on the 2022 Rally for Medical Research will be available [here](#).

AACR Science Policy Fellowship

In 2019 the AACR established a science policy fellowship designed to provide early-career cancer researchers with the information and tools necessary to advocate effectively for increased federal funding for cancer research and related biomedical sciences, as well as to support policies that are both science-based and patient-centered.

The AACR Science Policy Fellowship is a two-year fellowship developed under the purview of the AACR Office of Science Policy and Government Affairs. This fellowship is designed for early-career cancer research professionals who hold an advanced degree and are interested in the development and implementation of cancer research-related policies on the national level. The fellow will gain experience drafting, analyzing, and implementing policy through time spent working within the U.S. Congress, the National Cancer Institute, and in the AACR Office of Science Policy and Government Affairs in Washington, D.C., or at the AACR headquarters in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The Science Policy Fellowship is open to AACR members who are early-career cancer research professionals with advanced degrees received within five years of application, and who can demonstrate an interest in the relationship between cancer research and policy, and display excellent written, oral, and interpersonal skills.

Tod Guidry, PhD was the inaugural Science Policy Fellow, from 2019-2021, and the selection process has just completed for the second Fellow, who will start in March 2022. The next application period is expected to open in late 2023. Additional details and eligibility criteria can be found on the [AACR website](#) or by contacting [Dana Acton, JD](#), Director of Science Policy and Legislative Affairs.

Tod Guidry, PhD - *“The AACR Science Policy Fellowship served as an excellent and exciting transition into the policy world. As the inaugural fellow fresh out of a PhD program, I got the chance to view the world of science and health policy from the perspectives of both an advocacy organization and the federal government. The well-rounded nature of the fellowship, which in addition to a congressional rotation included experience across all of the AACR policy*

portfolios, allowed me to identify my particular policy interests and informed the next steps in my career. I encourage anyone wishing to direct their careers toward influencing policy to advance biomedical research and improve patients' lives to apply.”